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ABSTRACT

This paper presents the preliminary results of a short-term longitudinal study of the impact of literacy instruction on the lives of 76 adults enrolled in a literacy program at the Center for Literacy in Philadelphia. It begins with an extensive review of literature on literacy, adult literacy and adult literacy assessment. It describes the Initial Planning Conference, a structured interview, which was designed to collect information relevant to the adult's perceived needs and interests. The preliminary findings are presented under the following topics: (1) Who comes for literacy instruction?; (2) Why do adults seek literacy instruction? How do they expect it to affect the quality of their lives?; (3) What do they say they can already do with reading and writing?; (4) What are their strategies for coping with others' expectations that they read and write?; (5) What types and uses of print are they aware of in their environment? What do they use and for what purpose?; (6) What are their perceptions of the processes of reading and writing?; (7)How well do these adults read and write?; and (8) what strategies do they use in dealing with print? How do these adults cope with difficulties in reading and writing? Appendices include a demographic summary for those interviewed, their age and education distributions and their responses to the picture reading task. Four pages of references conclude the document. (JAZ)

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LITERACY THEORY IN PRACTICE:
ASSESSING READING AND WRITING OF LOW-LITERATE ADULTS*

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Part I. Introduction

The extent of literacy, or illiteracy, in the U.S. engenders considerable debate in public arenas. As public awareness of literacy problems has increased, the concern of politicians and legislators for undereducated adults has been expressed in a number of positive ways. In Philadelphia, for example, Mayor W. Wilson Goode recently (1984) established a Mayor's Commission on Literacy designed to coordinate efforts of the city's adult literacy providers who have long recognized the need for coordination and financial support. While sufficient funding of literacy efforts has failed to materialize in most quarters, some additional funding has become available and literacy programs have proliferated.

Many of these programs are staffed with a limited number of professional educators and provide instruction through the help of volunteer tutors from the local community. Because they are so decentralized these programs are complicated to administer, yet at the same time there is an increased need to be accountable to legislators and funders. Investment of time and resources in the evaluation of literacy programs, and particularly the assessment of the impact of those programs on adult learners, is a critical area which has received inadequate attention.

Problems with current assessment procedures derive from several sources. One prominent concern is the transfer of models appropriate for the acquisition of literacy in children to adult learners, with the result that adults who are not proficient readers and writers emerge as needing "remedial" work. Adult learners are widely considered to have "deficits" that require intensive prescriptions of skillwork to correct. In contrast to this orientation, a more holistic and socio-cultural view of literacy and illiteracy would address adult needs in the broad context of their use and practice in adult life. Rather than seeing literacy as an attribute of a person, then, literacy-as-practice theories regard individual differences in relation to context and often to the practices of different groups within the larger society.

A socio-cultural view of literacy that incorporates concern for cognitive and technical aspects of literacy development implies a very different approach to literacy assessment than is currently in use. Tests that focus solely on the technical skills of reading address only a part of the processes integral to becoming more literate in this society. The complexity and richness of adult learners' lives seem to demand the development of more holistic and grounded assessment processes rather than the simplistic assumption of a one-dimensional learning continuum or the implicit use of a deficit/remedial model. Assessment that provides the opportunity for systematic study of what literacy means to different learners, what counts as literacy to

different groups and individuals within this society, as well as what strategies adult learners bring to their interactions with print - these and other concerns are central to our understanding of the development of literacy in adults and to the evaluation of literacy programs.

The primary purpose of this paper is to present results from the initial phase of a short term longitudinal study of how instruction in literacy impacts on the lives of 76 adults who enrolled in a literacy program in Philadelphia. The study, called the Adult Literacy Evaluation Project (ALEP), was undertaken jointly by researchers at the Literacy Research Center of the University of Pennsylvania and administrators and staff members of The Center for Literacy (CFL), a not-for-profit volunteer literacy organization. The study represents an unusual collaboration between university researchers and agency staff members who together designed the study based in part on needs previously identified by the agency itself. The research group then worked to develop and implement a set of innovative literacy assessment procedures appropriate for use with adults entering the CFL program and for assessing the program's impact on these adult learners over time. These procedures were also intended for use with adults in other literacy programs and perhaps to have implications for learner-centered assessment of students in conventional school settings.

To provide a context for the findings from the initial assessment, this paper begins with a fairly extensive review of the literature related to literacy, adult literacy, and more specifically adult literacy assessment. Much of the material described in this section functioned as the reading for a series of informal seminars in which the research group (one university faculty member and two research assistants, seven administrators and staff members from the literacy center and several volunteers on the project) spent six months developing the initial assessment procedures. The next section describes the methodology of the project and presents the research questions that were generated from the process of collaboration. A fourth part presents some findings from the initial assessment, and a final section is a discussion of the project to date, in light of the broader theoretical questions that informed its design.

Part II. Review of the Literature

Perspectives on Literacy

In comparing theoretical perspectives on literacy, some broad distinctions between two divergent models proposed by Brian Street (1984) are useful starting points. The "autonomous" model assumes literacy may be considered a neutral and objective skill or set of skills, independent of any specific social context or ideology. In presupposing an acceptance of the cultural norms or values of the dominant group in a society, the autonomous model, in Street's view, seems allied with a notion of universal cognitive consequences for the acquisition of literacy. The "ideological" model, on the other hand, focuses on the social, political and economic nature of literacy practices, which may differ from group to group within a society as well as from society to society. This model challenges, rather than accepts, the status quo, and argues that claims for the cognitive consequences of literacy rest on the valuing of particular literacy conventions.

In the ideological model, it is assumed that all approaches to literacy are informed by ideology, whether implicit or explicit. Rather than a polarized alternative, Street's ideological model is already a synthesis of the two tendencies. As Street (1985) explains it:

> ...it approaches literacy quite explicitly from the point of view of its location in ideological and cultural contexts but it does not attempt to deny technical, skill or cognitive aspects. Rather the mental set within which these aspects are handled encapsulates them within the cultural whole and within structures of power, resisting attempts to represent them as independent or "autonomous."

In Street's view, by abstracting the technological aspects from their cultural and ideological location, advocates of the autonomous view set up a polarity in which one assumes these aspects can actually be considered independently, with the 'cultural' bits added on later. Rejecting the autonomous view entails recognition that neither approaches to literacy nor literacy practices can be considered neutral or 'objective'. By contrast, the ideological model takes a more anthropological view, focusing on the uses of reading and writing and on their social, economic and political meanings. Brazilian educator Paulo Freire, for example, argues that learning to read and write is fundamentally a political act. For Freire (1983), "reading the world precedes reading the word, and reading the word implies continually reading the world" (10).

Literacy, in Freire's view, involves interpreting and changing the existing social structures. From the 'ideological' perspective, being literate means using knowledge and experience to make sense of the world, not just decoding or encoding a set of technical symbols.

When literacy is considered 'autonomously', as a neutral set of skills, it is often perceived to carry with it individual benefits such as economic and social prosperity. This is one of the assumptions behind the Adult Education Act of 1966, for example, which equates literacy with better employment opportunities and thus with a more productive citizenry. Literacy is seen not as a right or an end in itself, but as a means to employment. And as Fingeret (1984) points out, American literacy education policy is often predicated on an economic model in which legislators expect a return for their investment (18).

It is not difficult to find flaws in the simple equation of literacy with prosperity. As literacy levels rise, so do the norms that govern what skills are needed and consequently, people may remain in the same relative position on the economic scale (Collins 1979 as cited in Fingeret 1984, 18). The Bureau of Labor Statistics projects that most jobs available in the next ten years will be in low-level service industries requiring few intellectual skills (Giroux 1984, 189). In looking at 19th century Canada, Graff (1982) has labelled the link between literacy and economic and social mobility as the "literacy myth." Instead he sees this perception as a way for society to argue for the socializing benefits of schooling, not the need to develop intellectual and technical competencies for their intrinsic value. Although there may be a relationship between literacy and economic opportunity, that link may be more complex than much of the rhetoric associated with "autonomous" literacy acquisition would suggest.

In discussing Scribner and Cole's research among the Vai tribe of West Africa, Heath (1980) describes literacy as "a culturally organized system of skills and values learned in specific settings" (126). If there are disparate individual goals and social practices in relation to literacy among the Vai, one would assume that the same is true in the United States (Scribner and Cole 1981, 84). Szwed (1981) also challenges the theory of a universal literacy, suggesting we look for a "plurality of literacies" that emerge from the different roles literacy plays in the lives of individuals and communities (16). To study the social meanings of literacy, we need to examine the roles literacy abilities play in social life, the types of reading and writing available for choice, as well as the contexts for their performance. Urging a functional rather than a strictly developmental approach, Scribner and Cole (1981) argue that programs in literacy may not have uncovered the wide range of aspirations and practices which give writing [and reading] value to different people (85).

Several studies of particular communities have shown that groups do differ widely in the

functions and understood rewards of literacy (Heath 1980; Reder, Green, Sweeney, & Cohn 1983). Heath looked at literacy functions (what literacy can do for individuals) and uses (what individuals can do with literacy skills) in specific communities, challenging popular (autonomous) definitions. She argued that it is not necesary to teach a single, hierarchical set of skills since "learners frequently possess and display in out-of-school contexts skills relevant to using literacy which are not effectively exploited in school learning environments" (132). The literacy Heath describes in a South Carolina working class community is characterized by a wide array of functions and uses quite different from those emphasized in school, while the "major benefits of reading and writing may not include such traditionally assigned rewards as social mobility, job preperation, intellectual creativity, critical reasoning, and public information access" (132). Heath suggests expanding definitions and methods to include not only traditional school-based skills but also the counterparts of these in out-of-school contexts.

One might conclude from community and cross-cultural studies that individuals can be expected to vary greatly in their purposes for reading and writing, in the texts they choose to read and write, as well as in the contexts for the performance of reading and writing activities. Literacy abilities, then, can not simply be ranked along a continuum from the unskilled to the highly proficient, illiterate to literate, because of the many possible interactions of reader/writer, text, purpose and context. An individual's literacy profile might be better conceptualized as a patchwork, a quilt in process, whose configuration is closely linked to settings which are in turn characterized by specific opportunities and constraints. As Scribner (1984) explains it, literacy then is not a feature or attribute of a person but is considered 'literacy-as-practice,' a range of activities that people engage in for a variety of purposes. Intra- and inter-individual differences in literacy ability reflect context-of-use, so that any individual's patchwork will be both unique and dynamic.

Perspectives on Adult Literacy

Defining Literacy If one rejects a normative model of literacy in favor of one reflecting multiple social uses and meanings, it is obvious that defining literacy becomes extremely problematic. Bormuth (1975) notes that "...there is no true definition of literacy. Rather, each definition must be designed for the purpose to which it is to be put, and its correctness may be judged only in terms of how well it serves that purpose (70). The best definitions, at least in terms of accurately reflecting the social and cultural nature of literacy, would be those that (1) emanate from individually defined goals and purposes, and (2) view literacy as a process, not as a product. As Fingeret (1984) explains, "to establish a national set of standards for a concept that is relative in relation to time and culture will, to some extent, undermine efforts to develop literacy programs that are appropriate to the varying needs of adults in their social contexts" (9).

Hunter and Harman (1979) distinguish between conventional literacy and functional literacy. Conventional literacy is the "ability to read, write and comprehend texts on familiar subjects and to understand whatever signs, labels, instructions, and directions are necessary to get along in one's environment" (7). Functional literacy is

> the possession of skills perceived as necessary by particular persons and groups to fulfill their own self-determined objectives as family and community members, citizens, consumers, job-holders, and members of social, religious, and other associations of their choosing. This includes the ability to obtain information they want and to use that information for their own and others' well-being; the ability to read and write adequately to satisfy the requirements they set for themselves as being important for their own lives; the ability to deal positively with demands made on them by society; and the ability to solve the problems they face in their daily lives (7-9).

While conventional literacy seems to fall within the boundaries of an autonomous model, functional literacy does not fit as neatly into the ideological perspective. Although Hunter and Harman emphasize individuals' rights to decide for themselves, which falls within Street's ideological model, other definitions of functional literacy (such as those that conceive of literacy instruction as 'survival skills') appear to derive from normative views about what society expects from individuals. An emphasis on survival skills may be linked to school programs tracking special and remedial education students into classes where this focus effectively provides a ceiling on student potential. In addition, teaching survival skills does not account for the fact that many if not most adults have access to social networks that help them 'survive'

outside of the test situation. Indeed, by not taking into account that people's goals may differ from the prevailing social, political and economic norms, this view of functional literacy seems to fall more within the autonomous model that aims to reproduce the dominant mainstream culture. An individually based, learner-centered definition of functional literacy carries within it its own contradictions, seeming to imply that acquisition of literacy will enable change in one's environment and life. As Hunter and Harman (1979) point out, learning reading and writing will not necessarily enable adults who are presently excluded from the many benefits of society to better their own lives.

Definitions of literacy seem to carry implicit notions of ownership and control, and thus are politically and ideologically charged. Cervero (1985) rejects the need for a common definition of literacy, claiming that such an effort would result in ". . .a clash of competing value positions, ideologies and power structures." The winners would be those who "wish to reproduce the existing social distribution of knowledge" and thus the question is not whether we need a common definition, but rather whose needs such a definition would serve (9).

Characteristics of Adult Illiterates The U.S. Census Bureau provides a range of statistics identifying illiterate adults in terms of age, grade level completed, employment, ethnicity and economic status and ethnicity (see Reder 1986 for a summary of recent census data). Learning more in detail about illiterate adults is difficult, however, particularly if they are viewed as individuals and not lumped into one homogenous mass. Hunter and Harman (1979) caution:

> Those of us who prepare studies about disadvantaged people run the risk of perpetuating stereotypes. We tend to simplify complex lives into cases to be analyzed, or problems that need solutions, or statistics to be studied. This tendency, and our inability to interpret with understanding the first-hand information that people give us about their aspirations and their lives, are serious blind spots (55).

One of the most overused metaphors in the field of adult literacy is that of illiteracy as pathology in which by extension illiterate adults are the diseased who need curing. In a recent study of adults as learners, Fingeret (1983) concludes that illiterate adults do not necessarily fit the stereotypes of dependency, weakness and failure put on them by the literate culture. Rather, the adults she studied operate within complex social networks in which they are interdependent, offering skills of their own in exchange for the literacy skills of others within their network. Furthermore, Fingeret saw no causal link between literacy and those adults who did see themselves as dependent, having little to offer others. She concludes that illiterate adults are as varied in interests, abilities and self-perceptions as literate ones (142). Reder's (1985)

studies of the spontaneous acquisition of literacy skills in minority communities makes a similar argument. Informal community practices may not actually teach "skills" but they provide adults the opportunities to learn a great deal about specific uses of literacy (13).

The extremely high attrition rate of 50%+ in U.S. literacy programs (Harman 1984, 32) suggests that many of these programs may not be congruent with what we know about adult as learners and thus fail to meet adults' needs. In addition, Hunter (1985) attests to a "creaming" process through which the majority of illiterate and low-literate adults simply choose never to attend. "Gaps between the target population and their participation rates in adult education are not closing. The poorest and least educated participate least in adult education" (Reder 1985, 10). Harman (1984) points out that adults are unlikely to remain in programs over a long period of time and that they are unlikely to be interested in texts that have little meaning in their lives. Unlike children, they are free to leave if they don't see it as relevant or advancing their goals (36).

In examining reasons why adults choose not to participate or to drop out of adult education programs, Cross (1983) cites three barriers to learning: situational, institutional and dispositional (98). The situational barriers, most often given as the problem, relate to specific situations that adults face at a certain time (i.e., lack of time due to family or job demands) (100). Institutional barriers include program cost, poor location or schedule, or an uninteresting course of study. Dispositional barriers - an adult's self-perception and attitudes about learning - are least often cited and the most difficult to pinpoint (107).

It is important to notice that Cross' analysis refers to adult education in general, and not specifically to the illiterate or low-literate adults, for whom dispositional barriers may be of primary importance. The autonomous view of literacy, as Street (1984) has pointed out, connects literacy with cognitive consequences - the transformation of minds and the creation of special cognitive abilities (Goody and Watt 1968; Olson 1977). The resulting negative view of illiterate adults is often internalized by the adults themselves, thus "limiting their capacity for change" (Eberle and Robinson 1980 as cited in Fingeret 1984,12). Adults in literacy programs frequently mention the feeling of being stigmatized and the accompanying need to hide what they do not know. Research that addresses this issue is clearly needed, as well as data about the retention and use of literacy among those who have completed educational programs.

Characteristics of Adult Literacy Programs If adult illiterates do not constitute a homogeneous group, then one would not expect to identify an ideal program model. As Fingeret (1984) explains, "The question confronting the adult literacy education community is not,

'Which program model is better?' or 'Which set of underlying assumptions is true?' Rather, educators must question which approach appears to meet the needs of which persons in particular circumstances" (37).

The two main approaches to teaching adult literacy are the individually oriented and the community oriented programs (Fingeret 1984). In individually oriented programs, literacy (conceived as the teaching of reading skills) is the primary focus of instruction; the orientation is to "mainstream" the adult into middle-class society. Though often located in the community, such programs do not often become involved in the community's problems. They are, however, "concerned about meeting the complex, interrelated needs of the individuals they serve" (20). Based on America's historical concern with improving the circumstances of individuals through education, most literacy programs in this country are individually oriented and reflect the society's desire to give those that have failed in traditional schooling a "second chance."

According to Fingeret, community oriented literacy programs are based on a different set of values and assumptions. Starting with problems identified by members of the community, literacy in these programs focuses on the community's culture and on empowerment, that is, "increasing the ability of persons and groups to control their lives" (21). Contending that it is the combination of services offered that make literacy programs effective community-oriented programs offer employment counseling, childcare, drug counseling and other services. Individually oriented programs also aim to empower adults; however, by emphasing individual development they differ in focus from community oriented programs which advocate collective action for the improvement of conditions in the entire community (21).

Although these two types, as posited by Fingeret (1984), characterize broadly two contrasting orientations of literacy programs, they fail to capture some of the subtle differences that make one "individually oriented" agency dramatically different from another. Analysis of single sites may help to identify some of these distinctions, and the Center for Literacy (the focus for this reseach project) provides one example. According to Fingeret (1984) who attributes the term to Mezirow, Darkenwald and Knox (1975), individually oriented programs are involved in a "creaming operation" in which the agency attracts "those who are most similar to the middle class adults who operate and teach in most of the programs" (Fingeret, 1984). The concept of creaming seems to be used by literacy workers in different ways, one to refer to a process of natural 'self-selection' and the other to signal a deliberate effort by service providers to attract a particular segment of the adult population needing help with literacy. These latter efforts may be <u>active</u>, i.e., setting entry requirements for a literacy program with a job training component, or <u>passive</u>, i.e., not enacting plans to seek out and attract those adults

whose life situations make it more difficult (or less likely) that they will come forward on their own to participate. Since CFL is already coping with a long waiting list of students and since they have designed their program to deal with what is called the 0-4 literacy range, they do not feel that they are "creaming" in the active sense.

A second distinction relates to the curriculum at CFL which has emanated from years of experience working with those who have come to the program. Moving away from a preset agenda or rigid use of prestructured reading materials, tutoring and teaching at CFL are based on the unique goals of individuals. At CFL, tutor training has begun to emphasize a broad view of literacy that may have the indirect effect of expanding the adult learner's own expectations. A third contrast with Fingeret's general characterization of individually oriented programs relates to this idea of expanded expectations. CFL staff members do not see themselves as "mainstreaming" if that term implies channeling students in directions that the adult learners themselves did not identify.

Some of the broad strokes of Fingeret's description, then, do not seem to apply to all programs equally. But like other individually oriented programs, as Fingeret describes them, CFL does aim to help adults participate fully in their own environment which the staff defines in unique terms for each adult learner. Evaluation of such programs is obviously problemmatic because standard reading measures do not capture adequately either the program's or the individual's goals. To develop assessment procedures congruent with various types of individually oriented programs, then, a much greater diversity of approaches may be needed than is currently available.

Perspectives on Adult Literacy Assessment

According to Bormuth (1975), for a definition of literacy to be of any use it must represent "a detailed and explicit statement of the goals of a research, development, or instructional program. . . "(72). Program goals and student assessment are also closely linked. Programs need to decide on their goals for students (or decide to build instruction around the students' own goals) before they can decide what and how to assess learners (Koen , Musumeci, Weeks, & Capalbo 1985, 2). Unfortunately, for adult literacy providers who wish to define individual assessment within a socio-cultural perspective, there are few evaluation alternatives available.

The lack of alternatives may be traced, in part, from the 20th century history of the reading field which has strived to make reading assessment appear scientific and "objective" by relying on quantitative methods (Johnston 1984, 149). It also stems from adult literacy programs' increased accountability to local, state and federal funding agencies. Student testamonials and records of numbers served are no longer sufficient. In the past twenty years funding agencies and policy makers have begun demanding more quantifiable records of student growth as a measure of program effectiveness (Cranney 1983, 419).

While Fingeret (1984) acknowledges that Hunter and Harman's definition of functional literacy is "conceptually true to the relative nature of literacy," she finds it "impractical for assessing the extent of literacy "(7). Fingeret sees a gap between "public quantitative" and "private student-centered goals" (26). Because Hunter and Harman's definition allows individuals to decide for themselves what counts as literacy and to set their own goals, it does not address the public's need to measure literacy attainment in quantifiable terms. For example, a student might count a gain in feelings of self-worth as more important than a gain in reading and writing skills per se, but such growth is not possible to capture in numbers, nor is it asked for by public funding agencies (Fingeret 1984, 26).

In a comprehensive survey of assessment in reading, Johnston (1984) describes two divergent models of reading performance currently in use (157). The ability model is grounded in Darwinian ideas about intelligence and focuses on stable abilities or traits which are frequently described as deficits and thus not amenable to change. The learning model, in contrast, is concerned with states, which depend on context or situation and are more responsive to instruction. In studies of reading failure, the distinctions between good and poor readers appear to be oriented to the ability model, thus attributing difficulty in reading to what Johnston (1985) calls "processing limitations and neurological factors" (154). An alternative,

state-based theory would focus on learning strategies, the "hypotheses and methods used by learners in different learning situations" (154). Failure to learn, in the learning model, may be attributed to external, rather than internal factors, including the role of the teacher and the educational environment.

With linkages to a medical diagnostic-prescriptive orientation, the trait model is widely accepted. Serving institutional needs to classify learners in school, the trait model also informs the design of instructional environments which may contribute, however unintentionally, to maintaining the cycle of failure. When reading is conceived of primarily as decoding (i.e., learning to discriminate between visual differences in print), instruction may naturally focus on a set of discrete skills, taken apart from their context of function and use. Assuming that reading is primarily about processes of understanding and making meaning entails very different instructional and assessment strategies.

Current Assesment Instruments

Commissioned in the early 1970s by the U.S. Office of Education, The Adult Performance Level Study (APL) was based on the assumption that "functional competency is directly related in a mathematical sense to success in adult life" (Northcutt 1975, 3). APL's definition of functional competence has been widely accepted at the national level and is also responsible for the most widely cited measure of illiteracy, the figure of 23 million Americans (Fingeret 1984, 8).

APL bases functional competence on three criteria: income level, educational level, and occupational status, thus producing three APL levels from adults who function with difficulty to those who are considered proficient. This approach has come under heavy criticism. Because of its inherent but unacknowledged value system (Griffith and Cervero 1977), the approach perpetuates the status quo. The authors assume a normative definition of functional literacy in which they attempt to set standards for society as a whole rather than looking at specific contexts (Kazemek 1985, 25). As mentioned earlier, applying national standards to a relative concept can detract from efforts to mold adult literacy programs to fit the specific goals of adults in varying contexts (Fingeret 1984, 9). The design of the APL study , as Kirsch and Guthrie (1977-78) note, is such that a substantial part of the adult population will always be defined as marginally competent or functionally incompetent. The harshest critique, however, claims that the study fails to confront moral and ethical issues:

> By failing to deal with the moral and ethical aspects of adult literacy -- indeed, by ignoring such aspects -- and by attempting to describe a value-neutral situation, the APL authors actually prescribe a form of literacy education which is designed to bolster and perpetuate often unjust social situations (Kazemek 1985, 27).

Linking the APL approach to an autonomous model of literacy and to the more reductive examples of functional literacy thus seems warranted.

In addition to the APL approach, there are a number of standardized tests that purport to measure functional literacy. The Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE) and the Adult Basic Learning Examination (ABLE) are often cited as the two assessment instruments most frequently used. The TABE is the California Test of Basic Skills rewritten in adult language. Often given as a pre/post test, it is designed to test vocabulary and comprehension and takes about 40 minutes to administer. Not intended for diagnostic use, the ABLE is an achievement test designed for pre/post instructional evaluation. Administered in 65 minutes, the ABLE contains an auditory assessment of vocabulary and a reading comprehension section with sentences and paragraphs. A reading grade score is given, although the publisher warns that the score "may tend to underestimate functional literacy of adults" (Karlsen, Madden & Gardner 1967, 31). A third standardized test is the READ (Reading Evaluation Adult Diagnosis). In a review of Literacy Volunteers of America's 1982 revision of the READ, Fox and Fingeret (1984) describe its orientation as subskill-based with the possibility of yielding diagnostic information, although instructional levels are difficult to interpret. This test focuses on the identification of sight words and on phonics subskills.

Although the problems with grade levels as indicators of adult performance and progress are well-established, their use in the field of adult literacy is surprisingly pervasive. As Bormuth (1975) points out in his critique of using grade levels to indicate the population's overall proficiency, grade level scores do not tell us what kinds of real-world reading tasks a person can perform (63). Grade completion is a similarly inadequate criterion. The use of grade levels to describe degrees of text difficulty is even more problemmatic (see recent criticisms of readability formulae in technical reports of the University of Illinois' Center for the Study of Reading).

Agencies that target their literacy instruction to illiterate and low-literate adults (those whose "reading levels" are designated 0-4) have the fewest choices among the current alternatives. The Center for Literacy, where this study is being conducted, formerly used the

Wide Range Achievement Test (WRAT). Although the test includes letter recognition, reading words, spelling and arithmetic, the reading words are often used independently for quick screening. This section consists of 74 words arranged in order of increasing difficulty. The student is to pronounce or attempt to pronounce as many words as possible, following the given sequence. A raw score is given, which converts into K-1 to 13.7 grade level. Although the authors discuss issues of validity, reliability, norming and score interpretation in the test, reading is defined as "the process of transcoding a series of visual-kinesthetic symbols into vocal or subvocal sound sequences" (Jastak and Jastak 1978, 65). In addition, although grade levels are given, the manual focuses on the diagnosis of reading impairment or disability.

Studies Using Qualitative Methods

In using qualitative methods that take into account an individual's experiences, strategies, and uses for literacy, some researchers and practitioners are rejecting the normed, standardized tests that are in current use. For those interested in more socially oriented and learner-centered methods of assessment, there are several studies that point in new directions.

A one-year longitudinal study by Gorman (1981) centered on assessing students' skill levels in reading and writing but also looked at general areas of student progress, including affective and other less quantifiable components of learning. Conducted after a large-scale literacy campaign in the United Kingdom, the study looked at a nationally representative sample of adult learners (n=1,263) early in their literacy instruction. The study was designed, in part, to devise a method for assessing degree of progress made in the course of one teaching year. Although it emphasizes student-defined functional literacy needs, the use of "authentic" materials, and includes writing as well as reading, this study depended on tutor and student use of checklists to describe literacy activities rather than on more open-ended questions. On the basis of the initial survey, learners were grouped into four levels of reading and four levels of writing attainment, though the distinctions among these groups were not clear-cut. The follow-up survey used two different tests, depending on the learner's initial performance. Gorman concluded that the majority of students were making progress and they and their tutors were satisfied with the outcomes to date. While it was easy to establish changes between the surveys, it was more difficult, however, to attribute these changes directly to the program.

To develop a clearer picture of adults attending literacy programs, Taylor, Wade, Jackson, Blum & Goold (1980) used a minimally structured interview with 17 participants in six programs in Washington, D.C. Researchers were interested in learners' goals, in their motivation for attending and remaining in literacy programs, in the importance of reading in

their lives, in their awareness of factors influencing their reading problem and their progress in their program, and in their coping strategies for dealing with reading tasks that were beyond their level. Among the most interesting findings were the "overwhelming testimony for the importance of affective aspects in schooling" (72) and the distinction between two general patterns in students' perceptions of reading: those who regarded reading as decoding proficiency (including those who said they had no reading problem but had difficulty understanding concepts and ideas expressed in print) and those who linked decoding with understanding. The students' goals were grouped as specific but broadly based (e.g., GED plus other reasons) or specific but narrow (e.g., read to get GED only); a third category included students with no stated goals or goals that were ill-defined. In this latter category were students who thought reading was "important" but didn't relate it to their own lives. Trying to link broad or narrow goals with independent reading was difficult, possibly because the interviewers did not probe sufficiently or because reading may be correlated not just with goals but with ability (74). A surprising outcome, according to the authors, was the minimal need for reading in participants' lives. "A picture of a print-poor and purpose-poor written language environment" (74) emerged with few incidences of job-related literacy requirements, in contrast with frequent mention of face-to-face communication and what Fingeret would call "social networks" that substitute for the need to read and write notes or messages. The authors conclude that since the environment seems to require minimal uses of the written word, the curriculum should have the goals of broadening "students' awareness of the role of written language in life and society" (75). Helping students to achieve more clarity in their own goals and , when appropriate, to broaden their focus for instruction, would seem to be important aspects of literacy programs.

Using a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods, Darkenwald and Valentine (1985) did a longitudinal study of the effects of participation in adult literacy programs. In addition to the acquisition of basic academic skills, they looked at the meaning of literacy in students' lives in relation to employment, family life and personal growth. Relying on telephone interviews, Darkenwald and Valentine's overall findings indicate many positive benefits from participation in programs. Interestingly, when asked for the "single most important benefit of participation," almost half the students gave affective reasons. Most tests, of course, ignore such unquantifiable aspects of education.

In an effort to get at some of the more elusive, metacognitive aspects of becoming literate, Gambrell and Heathington (1981) compared adult 'good readers' (college juniors) with 'disabled readers' who were students in a literacy program. Defining metacognition as "general knowledge that guides the reader in the selection and implementation of reading strategies," (216) they

used a questionnaire to study learners' awareness of motivation, prior knowledge and text structure in relation to reading ability. Both good and poor readers were aware of the importance of motivation and prior knowledge in reading, but good readers had better understanding of text structure. Their most striking finding, however, was the poor readers' lack of awareness of reading strategies and their perception of reading as a decoding process. Although the results may reflect greater ability of better readers to express what they know about reading, the authors suggest that results demonstrate a need to instruct adult literacy students in the task and strategy dimensions of skillful reading.

Possibly some of the most striking work in metacognition is the study by Johnston (1985) detailing three case studies of adult disabled readers. In rejecting a deficit or trait approach to illiteracy, Johnston argues instead that an "individual's goals, motives, and situations should play a much larger role in research into reading failure" (154). The use of case studies was designed to concentrate more holistically on the various "cognitive, affective, social and personal" factors that played a role in the learners' reading histories(155). Rather than placing the blame on the learner, the state or learning model suggests that the "source of reading problems is a lack of strategies, inadequate strategies and inappropriate generalized strategies" (154). Johnston's case descriptions of individual adult readers show the rich possibilities of such analysis. One challenge for more wide scale assessment of adults in literacy programs would be to develop procedures that would provide maximal opportunities for the demonstration of the strategies that adults use and for adults to talk about the circumstances of their lives that affect their literacy practices.

One source of theory compatible with these notions is the current literature on schema-theory. Supporting a view of literacy as socially construed (Fingeret 1984, 11), schema theory posits reading as interactive, combining bottom-up and top-down approaches. Reading is an active, constructive process in which readers' knowledge and experience play key roles. In assessing readers' use of reading strategies, then, it would seem appropriate to select texts that may be assumed to relate to adults' life experiences, instead of utilizing a set of isolated subskills. Valentine (1985) suggests we analyze several environments (e.g., workplace, home, and community) in which the adult learner operates daily and use that as the core of the instructional program. To describe these "literacy demands", Valentine urges the use of a carefully constructed interview schedule or even better, a continuous dialogue between learner and teacher "in the spirit of collaborative planning" (8).

In addition to the importance of drawing on readers' prior knowledge and experience, reading researchers also emphasize the social nature of the transactions involved in reading and

responding to a written text. In an article about reading in school settings, Bloome (1985) describes reading as a process that involves social relations among people (teacher and students, authors and readers) as well as among groups. In these encounters, readers acquire and maintain social positions and culturally appropriate ways of thinking, valuing and solving problems. For the assessment and instruction of adults in nonschool settings, these aspects of reading as a social process are critical dimensions to consider.

Conclusions

Even if more viable alternatives to assessment were readily available to program implementers, it is possible to embrace these procedures in theory and still reject them on the grounds that they are an inefficient use of the program's limited time and dollar resources. Johnston (1984) challenges the commonly held assumption that decreased time and financial investment compensates for decreased quality and quantity of information. He argues instead that programs can actually become more efficient by giving teachers a more fruitful handle on instructional dilemmas (168-169).

Yet another argument for developing and using more qualitative and individualized assessment methods is that assessment should be viewed as part of the teaching process. Using Vygotsky's (1978) notion of the "zone of proximal development" and Feuerstein's (1979) concept of "dynamic assessment," adults may be challenged to do more than they initially thought possible given a carefully structured, supportive environment. In such an encounter, the "focus would be directly on the interface of assessment and instruction, the two becoming part of the one dynamic process" (Johnston 1984, 173). In this view a lengthier assessment process would be seen as an inseparable and essential part of the whole rather than an additional burden or interruption of the teaching process. Instructors [and, we would argue, adult learners] need to have new models of how teaching and learning overlap and intersect (Fingeret 1984,43).

There is a new recognition that accepting the concept of reading and writing as processes - involving dynamic interchanges between learners and texts and learners and teachers - and literacy as varied and context-dependent, means that it is clearly insufficient to look only at the product when evaluating student growth. The process needs to be an integral part of any evaluation procedure (Vacca and Sparks 1981; Hamilton and Barton 1985; Fingeret 1984; Johnston 1984, 1985). Beyond that, to view adult learner participation and control as central to the learning process implies that adults should be encouraged to take a more active role in

designing their own assessment. To assess the process in individuals and to do that as much as possible in context, are significant challenges for researchers in adult literacy. The exploratory study described here was designed to take some steps in those directions.

Part III Design of the Adult Literacy Evaluation Project (ALEP)

Context of the Research

To address, and indeed to generate, the project's research questions, researchers from the Literacy Research Center at the University of Pennsylvania are working collaboratively with staff of The Center for Literacy (CFL), a not-for-profit, volunteer literacy organization located in West Philadelphia with instructional sites throughout urban Philadelphia. Targeting its program for illiterate and low-literate adults, CFL is the largest volunteer literacy agency in Pennsylvania and the oldest and most visible in Philadelphia, where the establishment of a Mayor's Commission on Literacy in 1984 has focused considerable public attention on the problems of the city's illiterate and low-literate population. CFL staff members train tutors not only for their own program, but through the Mayor's Commission train staff for a variety of other programs. In addition, CFL has written curriculum for use with volunteer tutors that is used throughout the area.

Although the CFL program provides a model for others, CFL staff members were extremely dissatisfied with their own efforts to develop informative and theoretically based assessment procedures. In a report written before the start of the project, Eno (1985) recounts the history of experimentation with different procedures for assessment at CFL. Although initial assessment varied some from site to site, it usually consisted of a student information form, a graded word list and whatever else that particular CFL staff person thought was appropriate. Its primary function was to determine if the student was reading below an eighth grade level, which six years ago was the program cutoff . At that time, there was no standard ongoing assessment of student progress. Occasionally students would ask to be assessed to see if they were ready to go on to a different program.

As staff became increasingly dissatisfied, various other procedures were tried and several site coordinators decided to use the Reading Evaluation Adult Diagnosis (READ) test published by Literacy Volunteers of America. Over the years, funding for CFL's program became tighter and tighter, and thus it became increasingly important to document student and program success. CFL staff decided to do this by documenting average rate of student progress (number of grade levels/time) and by collecting success stories in the form of functional literacy related achievements reported by the adult learners. When ALEP began in January 1985, CFL was collecting personal data and literacy -related goals, scores on the Wide Range Achievement Test graded word recognition list (to determine whether the adult read "below a

sixth grade level" to qualify for the CFL program), and some information on word analysis and sentence comprehension, using an adapted version of the Botel Reading Milestones Test. They had decided to use these procedures because (1) they were not difficult to administer (coordinators are not reading specialists), (2) they were not too time-consuming,and (3) they were readily available.

As Eno reports, however, many of the staff members were still very unhappy with what they were doing and, perhaps more obviously, what they were not doing. Among the problems that Eno mentions are the dependence on grade level as the primary descriptor of student progress. To say that an adult reads at a 2.5 reading level is not very informative and may be demeaning to adults, even when the coordinator explains that this number isn't "meaningful." Another problem was that all of these procedures except the discussions of goals were test-like. The adult learners came to CFL with histories of failure, and these tests had the effect of conjuring up past disappointments and inducing considerable stress (and as ALEP would make clear later on, without yielding very much useful information for tutors). When these procedures were repeated for ongoing evaluations, approximately every 50 hours of instruction or every six months, they did not capture what the adults were actually reading and learning. Thus the testing was anxiety-producing and not closely related to instruction; periodic evaluation sessions became a disruption rather than integral to the learning experience. The assessment procedures, and especially the WRAT, began to seem increasingly inconsistent with the evolving learner-centered definition of literacy at CFL.

Most important, Eno identified significant areas of literacy learning that were left totally untouched by the assessment. In their procedure, staff members never asked a student to read and respond to a whole discourse nor to write, despite the fact that tutor training emphasized comprehension and composing. There were no measures of changes in attitudes toward reading and writing, nor of the adult learners' ideas about what reading and writing involved and what part they played in their lives. And finally, Eno reports that staff were concerned they were actually reinforcing distorted notions that students (and some tutors) had about what is involved in learning to read and write, i.e., that reading is sounding out words and writing is handwriting.

As a site for the development and implementation of innovative literacy assessment procedures, the Center for Literacy was obviously ideal. CFL staff members were conscious that their organization was in the process of change such that discussion of conflicting ideologies about literacy and literacy instruction were considered appropriate, if not always comfortable, parts of the process. Staff members were deeply involved in developing and field testing new

curricular and training materials. As literacy providers, they had identified a clear need within the agency's work to improve their practice with respect to evaluation. More important, they were willing and anxious to collaborate in the design of the research and to participate in data collection and analysis. This factor is a critical dimension of the research methods that evolved, because it became increasingly obvious that people without firsthand, and current, experience working in this context with these adult learners could neither design appropriate procedures nor administer them in an ecologically valid manner. And without access to current research on assessment and without the support of a funded research project, such an inquiry would have been beyond the resources of the agency.

Design of the Study

To study how developing literacy is manifested in the lives of illiterate and low-literate adults who enroll in an adult literacy program in a major urban area, procedures were designed for use with adults entering the program and for assessing their progress over time. The assessment procedures represent local (i.e., specific to one setting) concepts of adult learners, yet they may be applicable for use with adults in other literacy programs and may have implications for learner-centered assessment of students in conventional school settings. Methods for data collection in this study consist of a two-hour interview (called the Initial Planning Conference - the IPC) administered by the CFL coordinator or ALEP research assistant, a second two hour interview (called Planning Conference II - the PCII) conducted about six months after entering the CFL program , as well as results of several related data sources (e.g. termination interviews for adults leaving the program before six months; tutor interviews, journals and questionnaires, as well as tutor retention data; and guidelines for interpreting the IPC for tutors). Interviews were conducted at three of CFL's sites. Beyond the actual assessment conferences (IPC and PCII) the additional data were gathered as project researchers identified new questions and/or perceived a need to relate the newly developed assessment procedures to the ongoing instructional program of the agency.

This paper will report on the development and findings from the Initial Planning Conference; subsequent papers will report on the development of the PCII, findings from the six month assessment, as well as data from the other procedures that grew out of the original design.

Development of the Initial Planning Conference

It is important to point out that the IPC was developed jointly by university researchers and literacy practitioners (administrative staff, tutor trainers, site coordinators, experienced tutors) with significant input from adults currently enrolled in the CFL program. In addition to an extensive review of the literature and discussion of the theory and practice of assessment, the collaborative research group examined the history of evaluation at CFL and the patterns of use of assessment procedures at other, similar organizations. The actual interview was piloted with 10 CFL students in the summer of 1985 and extensively critiqued by 20 students enrolled in CFL who were participating in a literacy support group. The critique was provided in the form of responses to a sample videotaped IPC. Thus the IPC went through ten major revisions over a period of six months.

In developing the IPC several assumptions were made about assessing adults entering a literacy program: (1) adults usually come with goals or objectives in mind; (2) adults come with concepts about what literacy is and what reading and writing consist of; (3) assessment procedures embody and thus convey particular concepts about literacy; and (4) learners' expectations about the processes and goals of learning and about their own competence in reading and writing may be informed and even strongly influenced by what the literacy agency chooses to test or assess.

Based on these assumptions and on theories of adult literacy assessment and reading/writing emanating from the literature, the procedure was designed with the following criteria: (1) assessment should reveal what the adult can do, not focus on deficits or problems; (2) assessment of adult learners should be dynamic and recursive i.e, varied according to individual differences that emerge during the interview and responsive to requests for help or assistance; and (3) assessment should provide information about the acquisition of reading and writing abilities in relation to attitudes about literacy, social well-being and social networks, community participation and employment. In other words, assessment should reflect a socio-cultural and contextual view of literacy rather than a more traditional view of literacy as a set of mental or psychomotor skills that may be assessed out of their context of use. The IPC was designed to make it likely that the adult learner would leave the evaluation encounter with an enhanced view of literacy, not a more limited one. In fact, the assessment procedure is currently conceived by the CFL staff as the first two hours of instruction in the program.

Describing the Initial Planning Conference (IPC)

The Initial Planning Conference is a structured interview designed to elicit information relevant to the adult's perceived needs and interests. It is divided into ten sections to be administered over two hours.

The first three sections (IPC Parts I, II and III) are designed to address the question:

(1) Who comes for literacy instruction?

Answers to questions in these sections provide a description of the particular population of adults who were seeking literacy instruction in an urban, volunteer tutoring program located in Philadelphia. These sections contain factual data about the person's life circumstances (e.g., ethnicity, marital status, dependents under 18 years, relevant health patterns, etc.), limited to what current CFL students (who critiqued a pilot version of the IPC) felt would not be considered too personal or sensitive. They also explore the adults' employment and educational background and current status in order to understand the environments in which they use and may need to use literacy skills. The employment section includes questions about the nature of their current jobs, if employed, as well as any aspirations for other jobs and experiences with volunteer work. These questions about volunteer work try to ascertain the nature and extent of the individual's social networks and involvement in the community. In addition, volunteer work frequently provides opportunities for the application of literacy skills. The education section invites the adult to talk about previous experiences in school, including other adult educational programs, and also explores other non-formal aspects of their educational experiences - e.g., whether the adult is currently involved in learning anything new (besides reading and writing) or whether the person is teaching anything to someone else.

Parts IV, VII, and VIII of the IPC are designed to discover the reasons adults seek literacy instruction, the role that literacy currently plays in different aspects of their lives, and their views of reading and writing. More specifically, these sections are designed to address the following questions:

(2) **Why do low-literate adults seek literacy instruction? How do these adults expect the acquisition or development of literacy skills to affect the quality of their lives?**

(3) **What do low-literate adults say that they can already do with reading and writing?**

(4) **What are their strategies for coping with others' expectations that they read and write?**

(5) **What types and uses of print do low-literate adults indicate awareness of in their environment? What do they actually use and for what purposes?**

(6) **What are low-literate adults' perceptions of the processes of reading and writing and what it means to be a proficient reader and writer?**

To elicit information relevant to these questions, several sections focus on these issues directly although no section confines itself to a single issue. Given the dynamic, recursive nature of the IPC interview, the interviewee needs to relate the parts of the interview to each other and to structure subsequent parts according to what was said previously.

Part IV is called Awareness and Use of Print and is designed to discuss where each person is actually doing some reading and writing, what kinds of print s/he is actually making use of in particular public and home settings, and where s/he is having difficulty. This section provides a general picture of how the person is functioning in an urban literate environment - what print the person is aware of that s/he would like to use and what s/he has no interest in making use of in specific contexts. This section also looks at what kind of supporting social networks the adult may have that provide assistance in literacy tasks and/or sources of support for the adult learner's own efforts. In particular, questions are addressed to the availability of print in the home as well as the patterns of use, including materials read by two or more people, read out loud, or written collaboratively. This section concludes with some questions about how learning to read and write better might change the person's life, including what problems might be

created by such changes. Finally, the adult is asked to anticipate what might cause him/her to drop out of the program.

Part VII, a survey of the learner's goals uses a checklist of possibilities derived from goals articulated by previous participants in the program over the past 17 years. These goals are divided into four categories: home and family-related, social, personal and job-related. For each item adults indicate whether they can do that already, whether they want to work on that now or later, or whether that item has no interest for them at all.

The next section (Part VIII) is called Perceptions of Reading and Writing and is designed to explore the learner's ideas about what is actually involved in the processes of reading and writing, i.e., the metacognitive aspects of learning to read and write. Questions address what reading and writing are good for, what makes them difficult, what makes some people good readers and writers, as well as how one might go about finding out how well someone reads or writes. Other questions elicit strategies for dealing with problems encountered in reading, and with underlying metaphors, attitudes, and/or misconceptions about learning language processes such as optimal relationships between reading and writing instruction.

Parts V and IX of the IPC are designed to ascertain the current reading and writing abilities of this adult population. More specifically, these section address the following questions:

(7) How well do these adults read and write?

(8) What strategies do these adults use in dealing with print? How do these adults cope with difficulties in reading and writing?

Part V begins with spreading out on the table a wide array of "real world materials" including the newspaper, People and Jet magazines, a driver's manual, a brochure on drugs, a children's book etc. The interviewer asks the adult whether s/he thinks s/he can read any of them or any parts of them. If the person says yes, the interviewer invites him/her to choose any one, read a part of it (silently), and then talk about what was read. If the person says s/he cannot read any of the materials presented, the interviewer explores what the adult might be

interested in reading. Another section contains a series of reading tasks including a very brief check on recognition of numbers and letters (upper and lower case), and recognition of words by reading signs in photographs and by reading other words that most often appear singly but in a meaningful context (e.g., open, danger, no smoking).

Section V also presents a booklet of short texts written by students currently in the CFL program. Staff members had collected texts written by CFL students and from these, five in a range of genre, relevant content and reading difficulty were chosen for the IPC. The authenticity of these passages (stories, poems, narrative descriptions, etc.) was verified when a group of current CFL students met to critique a pilot version of the IPC. The 20 participants in a literacy student support group read the CFL texts cover-to-cover, essentially refusing to continue the critique session until they had absorbed every word. Apparently the writing had a vitality and relevance this group of adults could immediately identify with.

In the IPC, the adult is invited to read each selection silently and then discuss his/her response guided by some open-ended questions. If the adult seems uncomfortable reading a particular text, the interviewer switches to a dual reading task and continues the same pattern of discussion. If the texts have been read silently, the adult is then invited to choose one and read it aloud. If the adult is extremely proficient with the CFL student-written texts, three additional types of text are used: a short story; a feature story, a Dear Abby column and an op-ed piece from a newspaper; and a selection from a history textbook used in some of CFL's advanced classes.

The section on writing tasks (Part IX) includes specific functional writing activities (e.g., making shopping lists from newspaper inserts, copying phone messages, etc.) as well as opportunities to write texts similar to the ones the interviewees have read earlier (by other CFL students).

Administration of the IPC

The three major concerns of the IPC - describing the adult population; exploring their attitudes, previous experiences, and interests with regard to literacy and literacy instruction; and sampling their performance in literacy (reading and writing) activities - are addressed in the interview described above. The actual administration of the interview, however, does not follow that order.

In piloting the IPC with current CFL students, several important considerations for interviewing adults emerged. First, adults expect and seem to want to explain their reasons for

coming to the agency 'up front.' An earlier version of the IPC postponed asking these questions until many others had been addressed. The research group thought that this was a sensitive, supportive strategy. CFL students interpreted this approach as artificially indirect and even suspiciously circumlocutious. The adults also expected to be asked to 'read' in the first hour of the interview. The original plan was to save the performance tasks until the end. This constituted such a violation of the adults' expectations that the reading section was moved to the first section.

Finally, it was clear that the rationale for such a long interview needed to be carefully explained. By providing a preview of the entire interview process, the interviewee could anticipate specific parts in relation to the whole. The first hour-long session ends with a review of what has been done in the interview so far, with an opportunity for the adult to add or ask questions, and then a preview of the second half of the IPC. At this point the adults are invited to take with them the booklet of CFL stories that were used in the interview. Similarly, the second hour session begins with a preview of the whole and ends with a review of the whole as well as specifics of meeting with the student's tutor. The actual administration of the IPC proceeds as follows:

FIRST HOUR

I. General Information
   (Preview, Name, Reasons for Coming to Program, Biographical Data)
II. Employment
III. Education
IV. Awareness and Use of Print
V. Reading Tasks
VI. Reflect Back / Forward View

SECOND HOUR

VII. Goals
VIII. Perceptions of Reading and Writing
IX. Writing Tasks
X. Reflect Back/Forward View

Summary of the Initial Planning Conference

The Initial Planning Conference consists of a two-hour structured, dynamic interview in which the adult learners are invited to describe and assess their own experiences, interests and abilities with regard to literacy and to begin planning for their own learning. The process is also designed to present literacy in its socio-cognitive and cultural context and perhaps to broaden the adult learner's concepts about what is relevant to the acquisition of literacy abilities in one's life. Emphasis is placed on expectations, on competence and prior knowledge, and on actively bringing what a person already knows to the activity of learning something that is partially new.

Data Collection after the Initial Planning Conference

Adults remaining in the CFL program after six months will be involved in a second planning conference (Planning Conference II, referred to as PCII) which will focus on some of the same areas as the first but with opportunities to discuss specific experiences in the program in relation to the learner's particular needs and expectations. Updates on educational experiences and employment will be included. The sections on awareness and use of print and perceptions of reading and writing will be repeated. The same goal checklist will be administered. Reading tasks will reflect the adult's success in the IPC and will involve some self-selected reading as well as think-aloud reading protocols, when appropriate for the adult learner. Writing will include functional and expressive tasks and will be linked to the adult's reading and to particular needs and interests.

While the adult is being interviewed with the PCII, the tutor will complete a questionnaire designed to elicit parallel (if not similar) assessments of the learner's and tutors' experiences so far. In addition, tutor demographics and tutor retention patterns will be collected, as well as a limited number of tutor journals and individual interviews with tutors who have been in CFL's program for at least a year. Adult learners who drop out of the program before six months will be interviewed by telephone. Additional funding is currently being sought to extend the longitudinal assessment of adults in CFL's program , to adapt the IPC and PCII for agency use beyond ALEP, and to explore critical related issues of tutor selection, training and retention.

The second assessment will make it possible to address several additional research questions:

(9) What do learners perceive/count as success in literacy programs?

(10) In what ways and to what degree does experience in a literacy program affect the pattern of adult learners' participation in social, economic and political processes?

(11) What are the relationships between particular adult's needs and abilities and particular modes of instruction? (i.e., group instruction v. one-to-one tutoring; different teaching/tutoring strategies)

(12) Do/how do different assessment procedures affect adult learners and learning processes/outcomes?

(13) How should individually based literacy programs assess their impact on individual adult learners? What part does the assessment of individual learners play in overall program evaluation?

Part IV. Findings from the Initial Assessment

The Adult Literacy Evaluation Project is a short-term longitudinal study of the impact of literacy instruction on the lives of 76 adults who have enrolled in a literacy program in Philadelphia. The assessment procedures represent an effort to design holistic, learner-centered methods that embody an ideological perspective on literacy and thus are responsive to the varied, contextual nature of literacy practices. At the same time, these assessments are designed to emphasize competence, process and use rather than deficiency, and to explore the different roles that literacy plays in the lives of different people.

Data will be collected at least twice, once at the beginning of each adult's program and again at six months. Preliminary results from the first assessment, the Initial Planning Conference (IPC), will be presented in this section. Additional analyses (not yet completed) of these findings will involve (1) the construction of individual profiles for each adult to be compared with their profiles from the second assessment, and (2) a search for patterns in the group as a whole.

Summary of Preliminary Findings

From our preliminary analysis of the first assessment, several findings are salient. In comparison with the general population in the areas of Philadelphia used for this study, a disproportionate percentage of those coming for help with literacy are currently unemployed. Of those employed , most hold lower status and lower paying jobs. Of those who are unemployed but seeking work, most are looking for lower status, lower paying jobs as well. On the other hand, when asked specifically about their aspirations, both employed and unemployed indicated an interest in what the Philadelphia Planning Commission (1984) calls "white collar jobs." These aspirations approach the actual employment patterns of the study neighborhoods. Another interesting finding was that 27% of those coming to CFL were neither employed nor looking for work at the present time. For those who were unemployed, the link they saw between literacy

and employment focused on doing what is necessary to apply for a job rather than on literacy skills essential for performance in the workplace. Those coming to ALEP have less formal education than the general population of their areas of the city and only 10% have completed high school. At least one in four of the adults interviewed was previously in some sort of special education program, although this is probably an underestimate because we chose not to ask this question directly.

The entire initial assessment procedure, however, provides a rich picture of adults with a wide variety of interests, needs and abilities. Although most do feel stigmatized and to different degrees handicapped by their inadequacies in literacy, they have developed coping strategies and social networks which make it possible for them to take on many personal, family and community responsibilities. A third come with general goals (related to reading and writing) while the rest come with more specific purposes that emerge from their interests and needs. Literacy to these adults seems key to interacting more fully with the world around them. Frequent references to feelings about their own inadequacy attest to the importance of the affective dimension of literacy for this population.

By emphasizing competence and use, the assessment procedure provided strong evidence of literacy abilities that were surprising to many of those interviewed. Since adults who come to literacy programs often bring with them histories of failure, this experience violated their expectations. It invited them to focus on what they can and want to do rather than on their problems and deficiencies. In maximizing their performance and exposing them to broader notions of literacy, the interview thus provided information for revising their self-perceptions and expanding their concepts of what is relevant to learning. The findings also indicate that almost all of these adults function in environments where they already participate in the active use of print. Some are highly independent in the use of literacy while others depend upon their social networks. For the most part they were able to do more of the reading tasks than either they or the CFL staff anticipated. The writing tasks were, by contrast, quite uncomfortable for most of the group. They appeared less confident about writing than about reading, perhaps because the writing tasks required a kind of self-exposure that was more public than the reading tasks.

The findings suggest that the adults interviewed bring what might be described as an autonomous view of literacy. Most equate reading with decoding and writing with spelling.

Though they demonstrate strategies for coping with difficulties in reading and writing, their individual repertoires are limited and often ineffective in dealing with the particular demands of text and context. Enhancing their understanding of the metacognitive aspects of reading and writing may be critical to achieving their goals. These adults have complex lives, and they bring considerable relevant prior knowledge to the activity of learning. For instruction to be congruent with this assessment, however, adults may need to expand their expectations about what is involved in reading and writing.

On the following pages, additional information from the preliminary analysis of the IPC is presented. These findings are organized in relation to the questions the interview was designed to assess. For descriptions of the specific tasks related to each of these questions, see Part III.

(1) Who comes for literacy instruction?

Very few adults report coming to CFL for reasons other than their own initiative. As one woman put it, "My children are gone. Now it is time for me to work on it [literacy]." Another said, "I've been thinking about it for a year and finally got up the courage to come. My brother wants to come too, but he's waiting to see how I make out."

Among those interviewed are owners of small businesses employing several people, factory workers, skilled tradespeople, those working in various service industries, unemployed persons looking for jobs, and those who are not presently in the labor force (e.g. women who do not work outside the home, retired persons and others). Using the U.S. census categories of employed, unemployed and not in the labor force, the employment status of those in the study is compared in Table 1 with the 1980 census data for the general population in the sections of Philadelphia served by the CFL sites in the ALEP study (Philadelphia City Planning Commission 1984). The category of "Not in the Labor Force" includes students, housewives, retired people and those "discouraged," i.e., not looking for work.

	ALEP	CITY
Employed	45%	44%
Unemployed	28%	7%
Not in Labor Force	27%	49%

TABLE 1: Employment status of those interviewed and of general population in their areas of the city.

From Table 1 it is clear that in comparison with the general population of these sections of the city a disproportionately large percentage of unemployed persons come to the literacy program. Their principal reason for seeking literacy help is to fill in job applications and to get a job. The percentage of those in the "not in the labor force" category is half of that for the general population. It is not clear from the data collected why this segment of the population is underrepresented. One might speculate that literacy is less of an issue in their lives.

The employed adults in this study hold lower status and mostly low paying jobs. The unemployed indicate an interest in similar types of jobs. In the general population of these sections of the city 56% of those employed work in "white collar" jobs and 44% in "blue collar" (Philadelphia City Planning Commission 1984). Among those interviewed, 91% have blue collar jobs and only 9% white collar. A majority (60%) of the unemployed said they were actually looking for blue collar jobs and an additional 25% said they were looking for anything. Only 15% are currently looking for white collar jobs.

A different picture emerges regarding occupational aspirations. Forty-seven percent of those employed and those unemployed aspire to white collar employment and 53% blue collar. Such goals are manifested in their desire for further education (e.g., getting a GED, entering trade school or receiving nurses' training). Table 2 summarizes current job or job search status and occupational aspirations.

	City	Adults in ALEP Study		
	employed	employed current job	unemployed desired job	aspirations employed & unemployed
White Collar	56%	9%	15%	47%
Blue Collar	44%	91%	60%	53%
Anything			25%	

TABLE 2: Employment status of population at large (in sections used for ALEP) and job/job search status and employment aspirations for those interviewed.

The educational experience of the adults interviewed is significantly less than that of the general population. The median grade completed is nine compared to 11.5 for the general population. Whereas 50% of the general population have completed grade twelve, only 10% have done so among those seeking literacy help. Their years of formal schooling range from only two or three to twelve, and at least 24% were in some sort of special education program.

The ethnic mix of the group studied also differs from the general population. Seventy-nine percent of those coming to the literacy program are black as compared to 48% in the areas of the city where they live. Whites constitute 18% and Hispanics 3% of those interviewed compared to 49% and 2% for the general population in those sections of the city.

From the above statistics it is clear that those coming to the literacy program represent the lower socio-economic and educational segments of the general population. But that does not mean that these adults fit the pervasive stereotype of the deficient, maladjusted illiterate. Fingeret (1983) notes that illiterate adults are as varied in interests and abilities as literate ones. Information collected about other aspects of the lives of those interviewed shows that most assume many personal, family and community responsibilities. Thirty-nine per cent are presently or have been involved in volunteer work. Some help in neighborhood schools, community programs or hospitals; others serve in religious organizations or work with handicapped adults. One women currently helps her neighbors with their mail since "they have

reading and writing problems."

Nearly half of these adults are actively teaching or showing someone else how to do something, including helping their children with homework. They are training new employees at their workplaces, teaching Sunday School, and instructing neighborhood children in sports such as boxing and basketball. Many (43%) are currently involved in learning something new besides reading and writing. At their worksites some are learning how to use computers. In the places where they do volunteer work, they learn such things as the government regulations concerned with Head Start, while others are learning such things as music and poetry on their own.

For 50% of those interviewed this was their first experience with an adult education program. Twenty-four percent had been in literacy programs before, including some who had attended CFL. Seventeen percent had tried GED classes but found them too difficult and were now seeking more individual help with reading and writing so they can eventually get their GED. Although only 5% report having been in job training programs an additional 8% wanted to get into job training but were unable to do so because of the literacy requirements.

(2) Why do low-literate adults seek literacy instruction? How do they expect it to affect the quality of their lives?

While most of the adults in this study live active, productive lives, many have told how in one manner or another they hide their inability to handle written material. Some tell of avoiding situations where they might be expected to read and write and others describe how they 'fake it' - such as the man who regularly buys a newspaper but never reads it. In Johnston's (1985) case studies of low-literate adults, the three men also used elaborate coping strategies to pass as skilled readers.

Others have expressed embarrassment at their lack of reading and writing skills. One woman refused to accept a proffered booklet of student texts. After a pause she asked, "Does this have the word "literacy" on it anywhere?" When the offending word was located in the

organization's logo on the title page, she proceeded to rip it off and only then agreed to take the booklet with her. In addition to feelings of embarrassment, many feel that they are a burden to their friends and family because they always have to ask them for help.

The reasons adults quit adult education programs, according to Cross (1983), can be grouped as situational, institutional, and dispositional. The decision to come to a literacy program has not been easy for the adults in ALEP. When asked what might make them stop or quit the program, 28% gave situational reasons (sickness of family members, job schedules, childcare), 5 % institutional reasons (program related such as lack of satisfaction with tutor, course too fast, too hard or uninteresting) and 27% dispositional reasons (depression, lack of progress in learning and embarrassment). In addition, 22% said they didn't have any idea and 17% said that nothing would make them quit or stop the program. Another insight into the difficulty of their decision to come is reflected in the large number of people who contact the agency about getting a tutor but fail to show up for the initial interview. Some weeks this is as many as 50% of those contacted.

With only a few exceptions, all of those interviewed perceive literacy as providing some access or entrance into the world around them. Some come with very specific goals such as getting a job. For others the interest in literacy is broad and general. Without literacy they feel they cannot interact effectively with their environment and the people in it. In the case of those looking for work, literacy is seen as necessary for filling in job applications or writing a job resume. For those who want to learn a trade or skill, literacy is necessary for passing the test to get into a job training program or school. The actual use of literacy skills on the job was almost never mentioned, except by those already employed, 65% of whom expressed some kind of difficulty with reading and/or writing in their workplace.

For many, literacy is seen as a prerequisite to continuing with some sort of formal education such as GED classes or nurses' training. Those who have children are finding that they want to read to their children and help them with their school work. They also need literacy skills to communicate with their childrens' teachers via notes and forms. Those who are involved in religious organizations express the desire to read the Bible, church bulletins and take notes necessary in order for them to participate more fully.

In this study only three individuals reported coming because they were recommended or encouraged to enroll in a literacy program: one by his employer, one by her grown children

and the third through a drug rehabilitation program. The man whose employer of 19 years had sent him stated repeatedly throughout the interview, "Well, if it doesn't work out, at least I can tell my boss I tried." In looking for a free night to schedule tutoring, he found only one possible opening and seemed reluctant to give that night up. His motivation, perhaps more external than intrinsic, did not seem as strong as for others entering the program.

The specific reasons given by the adults for coming to CFL's program have been categorized and listed in Table 3 along with the percentage of persons giving each reason. The total percentage listed exceeds 100% because some people gave more than one reason.

Reading (in general)	33%
Employment	26%
Education	17%
Self-Improvement (better myself, be like others)	16%
Helping Children	13%
Specific Uses of Reading and Writing (checks, driver's license, letters)	9%
Comprehension and Retention	4%
Spelling	4%

TABLE 3: Percentage of the adults interviewed citing each reason for coming to the CFL program.

When asked to say what they thought reading was "good for", in general, more than half stressed the importance of comprehension, communication and learning about the world. Thirty-four percent of those interviewed saw reading more in terms of survival, as in reading signs, knowing where you are, or "functioning in life." A third value seemed to be relating to others, i.e., social acceptance, interpersonal communication and self-improvement.

In terms of what writing is "good for," communicating, and in particular writing letters, was most often mentioned (64%). Writing for instrumental uses such as signing one's name, sending money orders, and filling out checks, forms and applications was mentioned by 33%. Twenty-six percent cited expressive uses (writing your thoughts) as important and 11% saw writing as an aid to memory. Twenty-three percent of those interviewed gave vague answers and in several cases equated writing with handwriting.

When asked how learning to read and write better would change their lives, more than 60% gave affective reasons. A majority (52%) responded with comments about increased independence, self-esteem and self-confidence. Individuals remarked that they would "be able to talk with others better" and would "be happier." An additional 10% made even stronger claims for literacy, making such statements as "Everything will be different" and "I'll be a new person." Others saw more specific connections with literacy such as being able to get a job or, if employed, getting a promotion. These findings parallel those of Darkenwald and Valentine (1985), who report that a large percentage of the adults in their study also gave affective reasons as the single most important benefit of program participation.

(3) What do low-literate adults say that they can already do with reading and writing?

In setting goals for instruction, the IPC focused the adults' attention on what they can already do, what they want to work on, and what was not of interest to them. Of the appropriate items on the list, all were marked by at least one person as something they were already able to do. The two most often cited were reading and writing their own names and addresses and using the phone book. Table 4 shows the items that more than 20% of the population reported they could already do.

Read and Write Own Name and Address	89%
Use Phone Book	49%
Read Bills	45%
Read Labels, Signs, Billboards	41%
Write Checks and Money Orders	34%
Read Menus	24%
Read Help Wanted Ads	22%

TABLE 4: Percentage of adults interviewed reporting competence in specific tasks.

One of the most powerful findings from the IPC was how many adults' behaviors and self-perceptions about their own literacy abilities seemed to change through the interview process. Combining assessment with a supportive teaching environment seemed to enhance the ability of the adults being interviewed, both to show more fully what they knew and also to learn about themselves in the process, a finding similar to Johnston's (1985). Because the IPC was at least initially designed to meet the needs of low-literate adults, those who had more advanced reading and writing skills were often nonplussed by how well they did. Some who initially saw themselves as "low literate" had a hard time fathoming that there actually are adults who struggled with the IPC reading and writing tasks. The IPC gave them a new perspective on their own abilities as readers and writers. One man, who throughout the first half of the interview called himself a non-reader, repeatedly asked if the program could help him and if he actually was capable of learning. When he was eventually referred to a community college program because his reading and writing skills were so advanced, he was at first incredulous. He left the interview smiling broadly, however, remarking that he didn't realize he was such a capable reader.

For those who came to the program with more limited literacy skills, the change in perception was even more striking. Halfway through the interview one woman remarked, "When I first came in I wondered if you thought I was stupid. Now I feel O.K. about it." Another

woman remarked before leaving, "I learned today that I can do it." Another woman who seemed very tense initially, left with a big smile remarking, "I think I'm going to enjoy learning." One of the more poignant examples is that of a man who refused to come except accompanied by his friend who had agreed to tutor him. He grew increasingly vocal as the interview progressed and soon sent his friend away, commenting that he would be all right on his own. At the end of the interview he exclaimed, "Wait until I tell my friend what I can do."

(4) What are their strategies for coping with others' expectations that they read and write?

As with the three men in Johnston's (1985) case studies, the adults in the ALEP study who had difficulty with reading and writing had also developed strategies for coping with this limitation. One man commented that in restaurants he looks on the menu for words he recognizes, such as beef, or he just orders something he is sure will be there. Another man who is a short-order cook has learned to recognize the waitresses' shorthand for all the items on the menu. One of the strategies the men in Johnston's study had developed was bypassing reading and writing whenever possible. This was also the case for several of the adults in the ALEP study who made explicit statements about ways in which they avoid reading and writing.

Johnston notes that often these men were aided by family and friends who wanted to help out. Many of the adults in the ALEP study also had a social network they could turn to for help with reading and writing tasks. Many would take forms or applications home so they could get help in filling them out. As with Fingeret's (1983) study of the social networks of 43 illiterate adults, most seemed to have a few trusted friends or relatives from whom they could seek help. One woman often wrote letters leaving blanks for the words she didn't know. Later she would have a neighbor help her fill in the blanks.

While some of the adults might fit Fingeret's (1983) description of "cosmopolitan illiterate adults," others seemed to better match her perception of "local illiterate adults" because of their lifestyle and network composition (141). A "local illiterate adult" might be exemplified by those who said that they stayed home for fear of getting lost and not finding their way home again because they couldn't read the signs.

(5) What types and uses of print do low-literate adults indicate awareness of in their environment? What do they actually use and for what purposes?

In trying to come to a better understanding of the role print plays in the lives of these respondents, the IPC asks questions about the adults' literacy environment. This was part of an attempt to attend to the social context for literacy and to discover at least in a limited way the functions and uses of literacy in their lives (Heath 1980).

In general, literacy was reported to play a part in the activities of the home for 90% of the adults interviewed and is the place where respondents do the most reading and writing. Only a few individuals were like the person who lives alone and stated the only texts in his home were materials from his last tutor that remain stored away in a box. The majority reported having numerous kinds of printed material in their home and living with others who read and write. One women described how her husband sits and reads by the hour. Among the materials most frequently read were the newspaper (40%), mail (including bills) (31%), books (21%), the Bible (16%), magazines (14%) and miscellaneous references to everything from poetry to the dictionary. Sixty-one percent mentioned some sort of writing that they themselves do at home. This included checks and money orders (23%), letters (23%), lists (18%), practice activities such as handwriting and copying (16%), and notes and messages (14%).

Sixty-eight percent talked about literacy in use outside of their home as well. They reported doing such things as reading signs and labels and filling in forms in such diverse places as on the job, in the supermarket, homes of friends and relatives, service agencies and in the street. Several reported even using a computer to log attendance and monitor inventory. Employment related writing accounts for 91% of all writing mentioned outside the home.

(6) What are low-literate adults' perceptions of the processes of reading and writing and what it means to be a proficient reader and writer?

In assessing these adults' ideas about reading and writing, two data sources were used: 1) their self-appraisals of reading and writing problems, and 2) responses to questions on

metacognitive aspects of reading and writing. In analyzing their own reading and writing problems, the majority of adults (70%) could be classified as those who saw reading primarily as decoding. Eighteen percent of the adults interviewed (including 9% who mentioned decoding first) saw reading as comprehension (similar to Taylor et al. 1980). Some 13% had no ideas and the remainder (8%) said no problem and/or gave a physical cause. Those who saw reading as decoding gave answers in terms of problems with words such as "the big words," "pronouncing the words," or "breaking down the words." Those in the comprehension category talked in terms of having trouble understanding texts.

The self-assessment of writing problems paralleled those of reading. Most emphasized the technical and non-meaning aspects of writing as important. Fifty percent considered spelling their major problem with writing. Writing was equated with handwriting by 16%. Others said that they had no problem with writing, meaning their handwriting. Only 5% focused on the cognitive aspects of their writing problems.

In identifying their own problems with reading and writing, then, the ALEP group responses follow similar patterns. Likewise, their perceptions of what it takes to be a good reader paralleled what they perceived makes a good writer. Twelve percent cited communication of ideas as most important in writing, just as 9% mentioned the need for comprehension in reading. Twenty-two percent cited spelling as the most important aspect of writing and 34% said that good readers needed to know the technical aspects of reading generally connected with decoding. Only 13% mentioned a connection between being a good reader and being a good writer. Other responses for writing indicated a wide variety of items such as penmanship, the alphabet, grammar and word choices. Thirteen percent of the respondents said that they didn't know. In terms of reading other responses focused mainly on attitude, vocabulary and practice.

When asked how someone can become a good reader, 47% of the adults in the ALEP study said that practice was the key ingredient. Twenty-two percent gave attitudinal reasons such as, "they put their mind to it," "they want to do it," "like to read," and "study." Innate ability or intelligence was mentioned by only a few. Eight percent said they didn't know. The focus on practice and persistence (attitude) is also reflected in the Gambrell and Heathington (1981) study in which both the good and poor readers saw motivation and interest as important aspects of reading (220).

As with reading, the majority considered practice necessary to becoming a good writer.

Cognitive responses (i.e., having ideas and understanding) were mentioned by 10% of the adults in the study. Ten percent said spelling was important. The other responses covered eleven categories, including such things as natural ability, education, attitude, and handwriting. Eight percent said they didn't know.

Those interviewed were also asked why good readers sometimes have difficulty reading. One third of the responses focused on not knowing the words (either the meaning or the pronunciation). For the 20% who said they didn't know why that would be so, they may have equated reading with decoding. Some of the other reasons included retention, attitude, practice, and physical problems such as poor eyesight.

A similar question was asked regarding writers. Technical responses in which writing was viewed as decoding (e.g., spelling and phonics) were most frequently given. Twenty-two percent gave meaning-related responses such as not being able to think of ideas or having difficulty selecting the right words. Attitudinal responses (e.g., "tired of it," "don't like to write," "Not satisfied with what they write") were given by 16% of the respondents.

(7) How well do these adults read and write?

One of the most interesting findings from the initial assessment was the staff's surprise at the adults' general performance on the reading tasks. In the planning sessions CFL staff had frequently commented that the reading texts would be difficult for most people. In actuality, nearly half (47%) of those interviewed had little or no difficulty understanding the student-authored texts. After the first 42 interviews were completed the research group decided to add several more advanced reading tasks as well. Of the remaining 34 adults interviewed, 44% used at least some portion of the more difficult texts. On the other end of the spectrum, 28% of those interviewed could not read any of the text by themselves.

Several explanations might account for the discrepancy between the CFL staff's perceptions and the actual performance of these adults. The IPC's integration of assessment and instruction is likely to have been one factor in the adults' relative success. Johnston (1984)

claims that the teaching/helping model challenges the learners to exceed their own limits, while also providing a supportive environment. The reading tasks also had ecological validity in that they were similar to real reading tasks and situations (Johnston 1984, 169). They were based on reading materials that drew on the adults' prior knowledge and conceptions about print. And as Anderson (1981) has pointed out, "test materials unrelated to the examinees' past experience, or lacking cultural or social significance, often significantly mask ability" (9).

The IPC also stood in direct contrast to the WRAT, which was the instrument the staff had previously been using for initial assessment. One staff member commented in retrospect, "Students interviewed with the IPC would say, 'I did better than I thought I would.' They never said that with the WRAT. Instead they would say, 'Oh, those words I don't know.'"

Three quarters of those coming to the program made no errors at all with the letter and number recognition sections of the IPC. Only one person had extreme difficulty with the letters (recognizing 8 out of 30), but had no problem with the numbers. All the others made fewer than four errors.

The reading task that utilized pictures of signs was administered so that the adults could choose which items they wanted to read for the interviewer. The results indicated that in general the more accurate readers attempted orally more items and those who attempted fewer items were also less accurate (see Appendix D). Thus both groups had a good idea of what they could do and the more capable readers had a somewhat better sense.

The most capable readers found the reading task using the pictures to be "juvenile." One woman commented on finishing it, "That was the most stupid thing I ever did." Less capable readers found the task interesting and rewarding for they could demonstrate what they felt they could do. One man in the middle of reading a menu in a picture of a snack stand at the zoo stopped and commented, "I don't know how come I can read this tonight. Usually I'm not able to."

The "Real World" reading materials task provided another opportunity for adults to pick what they felt they could read and demonstrate how they could handle the material. Nearly half (49%) demonstrated that they could read some of the materials and comprehend them reasonably well. On the other hand, those who read with difficulty were generally <u>not</u> able to select accurately what they might or might not be able to read. One man picked a page with pictures of people and tried to read the captions only to discover that they were mostly names, none of which he knew nor could read.

The CFL-authored reading texts were attempted by 75% of the adults in the study. The interviewer read the texts aloud for the others so that each one could be discussed. One third of those reading the texts for themselves were judged from their discussion after each text to have grasped the meaning of all five texts. The remaining two-thirds had difficulty comprehending one or more of the texts. In general, the adults in this study had strong emotional and critical reactions to several of the texts, clearly indicating that they were comprehending what was on the page and connecting it to their prior experience and knowledge. Despite the preoccupation with decoding that other parts of the IPC would suggest, the adults responded to these texts in an active and meaning-centered manner.

Of the 44% who seemed capable of reading the more advanced material, 21% were able to read and comprehend these texts quite adequately. Fifteen percent tried all of the texts but were able to do only about half of them. Sixty-two per cent tried one or two of the texts but found them too difficult. Although this would seem to indicate the need for additional texts between the CFL-authored and advanced reading selections, some interviewers varied the order of presentation of the advanced texts so that determining the relative difficulty of these texts would require additional study.

Writing posed considerably more difficulty for people than did the reading tasks. All but 13% were able to make a shopping list from a newspaper flier that was clear enough for use by another person. The intent of the phone message dictation was for the adult to write down only the necessary information for later recall, but more than half copied the message word for word and others rephrased it but without reducing it. The free writing task was attempted by 88% of the population.These adults wrote either short, functional texts or longer, more expressive pieces. The first category included addresses, lists, words, notes and messages. The second group included narratives, poems and expository pieces. The most anyone wrote in the free writing task was a letter of 103 words. Some adults who may have been able to do something simply said they couldn't write. Others started and wrote a few words and gave up. In general, the writing ability as demonstrated in these few tasks seems to correspond with reading ability on the ALEP tasks, with the more capable readers writing more confidently and the less capable readers having more difficulty.

(8) What strategies do these adults use in dealing with print? How do these adults cope with difficulties in reading and writing?

In the way it reveals reading and writing strategies of adults in the ALEP study, the IPC is congruent with a state or learning model of reading (Johnston 1984, 1985). Instead of labeling the adults as deficient, this view holds that adults use various strategies in dealing with print. Throughout the reading tasks the interviewers were able to observe the adults using strategies to cope with reading difficulties. At times the adults themselves described what they were doing. Several questions in the interview also asked about how they handle such problems. Strategies mentioned included guessing, trial and error, 'pick and choose', 'keep trying' and 'keep moving.' Some mentioned relying on specific decoding strategies, while others relied more on comprehension or meaning-related methods.

Most of the reading problems mentioned concerned decoding words. Generally these adults try to "figure out the word" in one way or another. The various decoding techniques mentioned or demonstrated represent a wide array: spelling the word repeatedly, substituting words that start with the same sound(s) until one makes sense, trying to pronounce syllable by syllable, and looking for a word within the larger word and then building on that.

If their decoding strategies do not work the majority stated that they skip the word. But some people are more persistent than others in trying to decode it. Only a few persons mentioned that they go on and sometimes can get the word from the context. Others said they turn to a dictionary or someone else for help. After having "read" a text, many reported have difficulty remembering or understanding what they had read. The most common strategy in such cases is to resort to rereading. But one man, when he came to a word he didn't know while reading a text reasonably well, just quit and said he couldn't read the rest.

When adults in the Gambrell and Heathington (1981) study were asked, "What do you do when you don't know a word?" the good readers all described a strategy , but approximately one third of the poor readers could not think of any or were unaware of what strategies they used. In contrast, none of the adults in the ALEP study gave an"I don't know" in response to this question and only 13% reported asking someone for help as their first strategy. Instead they revealed a range of metacognitive strategies, although some of them (e.g., guessing, relying heavily on phonics, avoidance) were not particularly helpful. What is salient here, however, is

that these adults report monitoring (i.e., being aware) when they do not understand and having some, albeit limited repertoire of methods for coping with these difficulties.

Part V. Discussion

Last year before the ALEP project began, one of the CFL site coordinators tested a 20-year-old woman who appeared to be retarded. Although her score on the WRAT put her on the sixth grade level, the coordinator was reluctant to place her, so she remained on the waiting list. This fall the woman's mother contacted CFL and begged the site coordinator to test her daughter again. Although she was working at a sheltered workshop and had a tested IQ of 44-77, her mother described her as a good learner. As a "favor," the CFL staff member decided to give her the IPC.

When she came for the interview, the young woman walked and responded very slowly. But the CFL coordiantor was surprised at her answers, which she found more emotional, intelligent, and sophisticated than almost anyone she had ever interviewed. Once during the interview the coordinator yawned, and immediately the young woman began rocking and giving "I don't know" responses, while looking like she was about to cry. The coordinator excused herself to get a drink of water, and when she returned to the interview, she explained to the young woman that she was just tired. Laughing and seeming relieved, the woman once again began giving more elaborated responses, talking about her own writing and other concerns.

By the end of the interview, the site coordinator had decided to tutor her herself. As they have worked together, the coordinator finds that she never has to explain anything more than once. At one point, she reported that "the more I tutor her, the less her behavior conforms to the stereotype." The woman wrote an essay during one session that spoke of her loneliness and desire to meet other people. At first reluctant or unable to express opinions about what she read, she has begun to talk more openly. Once she commented, "Nobody ever asked me anything."

The site coordinator says she finds it challenging to work with someone "on a higher level," and reports that "she always surprises herself with the things she can do. And she always surprises me." In fact, the CFL staffer says, "she doesn't seem like the same person." More recently, she reported that the young woman had been retested for her IQ. The tester told the CFL staffer "There's no way she's retarded."

As mentioned earlier, the IPC is designed to explore learners' current strengths and individual interests rather than focus on deficits or etiology. Many of the adults in this study seemed to emerge from the IPC with enhanced views of their own competence and in some

cases more accurate information about their needs relative to others who seek literacy instruction. Yet the interview process also surprises many people, some who anticipate conventional testing procedures that focus on words and sentences in isolation. "What do you mean I have to read?" one woman asked. "What kind of a program is this?" Another person lectured the interviewer about how she should be tested. To be respectful of and responsive to peoples' different views of "what counts as success" while providing a broad view of literacy may be a challenging endeavor. A movement toward learner ownership - of the processes of learning and evaluating that learning - needs to take into account that adults' experiences with, and hence their expectations about, literacy have been constructed largely by their prior education. Learning literacy in school has more often meant a bottom-up, skills orientation than the holistic, collaborative, dynamic and learner-centered approach implied by the assumption of an ideological stance.

CFL staff members feel that the IPC is likely to have a positive effect on student retention, which has been a serious problem during the first few months of the program. With the IPC, interviewers feel that learners form a closer initial relationship with the agency and acquire a better understanding of what's involved in reading and writing. The reduction in anxiety provides a better start. As most adults find out that they can read and write more than they thought they could, they begin to see themselves immediately as readers and writers. And asking direct questions about reasons for quitting may help adults to anticipate problems before they occur.

Because the IPC tends to maximize adult performance, various decisions needed to be made at CFL about referral and placement. The discrepancy between the WRAT and the IPC is illustrated by one woman who enrolled in CFL's program, having qualified on the basis of her low score on the WRAT. Although she was given a tutor, she quit the program after her tutor quit, but returned a year later, wanting to work with another tutor. Not realizing at first that the woman has been in the program previously, the coordinator gave her the IPC and decided she was too advanced for CFL's program. A director of a service agency, the woman had successfully read the more advanced texts and because someone was waiting for her, hurriedly dashed off the writing tasks without any difficulty. When a person reads quite competently on the IPC, the interviewer needs to decide whether difficulty in writing or a limited repertoire of metacognitive strategies is reason to match that person with a tutor. The option is to send the person to a more advanced class or a GED program, yet few of these available are likely to provide the supportive environment for learning to read and write for one's own personal, employment and/or social purposes. Most GED programs focus exclusively on the skills needed

to pass the standardized test, to which writing will be soon added.

A related but perhaps more serious issue has to do with tutor expectations and tutor retention. As Gorman's (1981) research has suggested and CFL staff confirm, many tutors have a deficit view of literacy learning and feel most comfortable when working systematically, in a "teacherly fashion," through a set of structured skill books. Tutors may be "well-intentioned" but "misguided", as Fingeret (1984, 44) has pointed out. The CFL training for tutors presents a broader, more collaborative and meaning centered approach. But very little research has been done anywhere that follows up on the training to look at the actual teaching practices of volunteer tutors. What tutors count as success in literacy is also important here, because tutors can become easily discouraged if their adult learner fails to make visible progress on the tasks they see as most significant. It is clear that the tutors need to be acquainted with the broader view of literacy-as-practice and with the assessment procedures in use; tutor training should be consonant with the ideology that informs the learner assessment procedures. Tutors may benefit from exploring their own "metacognitive" awareness of reading and writing as processes. Training tutors to work collaboratively with adult learners is central to the relationship, with congruence between assessment and instruction the obvious goal. As Harman (1970) points out, "evaluation should be incorporated into programs from their inception, not to prove success, but rather to facilitate innovation and revision of programs" (237). In the conclusions from the National Adult Literacy Project (1985), the authors make a similar point:

> Programs with a commitment to integrate and systematically plan, implement and evaluate all aspects and components of their educational process -- those that create a coherent system of adult literacy instruction -- appear to be the ones that are most successful (2).

It is important to keep in mind, however, that attracting and retaining tutors is a serious problem. Fifty percent tutor retention is typical of urban volunteer literacy programs and is a serious impediment to maintaining the quality of instruction.

Other dimensions of individually based literacy programs invite further study. Since data on adults' awareness and use of print is quite difficult to ascertain in an interview setting, more ethnographic methods might be used to elaborate our understanding of different adults' patterns of use. Studies such as Heath (1980) and Reder (1985) present the obvious contrast here, although both focus on literacy use in out-of-school contexts. Although tutorial in design and focused on individually-selected goals, CFL and other learner-centered agencies

may be preferred by students because they want a structured experience similar to school. More research is needed on the possibilities and constraints, and perhaps even some contradictions, inherent in an individually based literacy program emanating from a more ideological than autonomous model. In an urban, heterogeneous community, adults who come to agencies like CFL do so in part because they can participate 'anonymously.' One result is that most of these adults are effectively isolated one from the other. Efforts to generate student support groups have been only partially successful. More extensive use of small and medium sized groups for literacy instruction might provide a wider arena for literacy practice in a social context and the opportunity to build a supplementary learning and support community that some urban adults may want and need. A not-so-hidden agenda for individual empowerment connects access to literacy with wider participation in social, economic and political processes, but that dimension of adults' experience with individually oriented literacy programs has yet to be studied.

Another important dimension of this collaborative research has been a process of staff development involving inquiry into ever-widening circles of the center's program. The project began with a series of informal seminars over five months in which the research team (CFL staff members, LRC faculty and graduate students) read and discussed the current literature on theories of literacy and literacy assessment. Together the group analyzed some of the underlying assumptions of the CFL program, such as how literacy is defined, what constitutes 'adequate' literacy performance, and what adults would be best suited for the CFL program which has been designed, specifically, to serve what literacy providers refer to as the 0-4 population.

The issues that emerged from these discussions led to a review of CFL's history, especially the evolution of methods for evaluating the program's impact on individual adult learners. As we worked together, some conflicts surfaced, such as the usefulness of traditional measures (e.g. the Wide Range Achievement Test) in evaluating and placing students, and the constraints associated with reporting grade level data to the state of Pennsylvania. When we began conducting the initial assessment, CFL staff had to revise their own expectations about what these adults were already able to do. Some students who had previously scored poorly on the WRAT, for example, did surprisingly well on the IPC reading tasks and as a consequence, the staff needed to examine critically the instructional program. With the inclusion of writing tasks in the assessment, new criteria needed to be developed for determining whether students who read well but could not write should stay at CFL or be referred to a more advanced GED or ABE program.

As staff members saw the potential of alternative assessment procedures for providing rich descriptions of adults' skills, interests and needs, they became increasingly disenchanted with a more conventional emphasis on reading levels and scores on tests. This strengthened their commitment to making other parts of the CFL program (such as tutor training) more congruent with the direction of the assessment project. Thus research efforts in one part of the agency's work served as a catalyst for reexamining and revising practices in other areas. This type of collaborative research probably calls for some systematic documentation as well, since agencies may be reluctant to devote resources to research projects without a clear sense of their advantages in applied work.

In her recent monograph containing recommendations for further research, Fingeret (1984) suggests that university researchers collaborate more with people working in literacy programs. Important topics to study, she suggests, include the processes by which adults learn to read, the nature of volunteer programs, and the complexity of adult illiterates' lives. To do so requires sophisticated models that can take into account the interactions among individual, culture and larger social forces. Just as literacy education is considered by many to be political, the activity of teaching and learning involves what Hunter (1982) calls "empowerment and social change." To see the young "retarded" woman's experience in its socio-political context is to value her use of literacy to "read the world as she reads the word," (Freire 1983) and to become involved in issues of justice and access for those whom different societies have marginalized or made powerless. Each of the adults who come to literacy centers such as CFL have their own unique reasons for coming, and many lead very active, engaged lives. Yet they have in common a sufficiently strong feeling about the issue of literacy in their lives to seek outside help. Radically changing the nature of the assessment process and thus positively affecting adults' views of their own potential may be a critical part of the empowerment process.

APPENDICES

A - Demographic Data Summary

B - Age Distribution

C - Education Distribution

D - Attempted vs Correct for Picture Data

Appendix A

Demographic Summary For Adults Interviewed with ALEP IPC

	EMPLOYMENT*		AGE				EDUCATION			
			n	MAX	MIN	AVE	n	MAX	MIN	AVE
MALE	Y	BLACK	17	53	21	33	16	12	3	9
		WHITE	4	39	19	29	3	11	8	9
		HISPAN	1	21	21	21	1	12	12	12
	TOTAL:		22	53	19	32	20	12	3	9
	N-L	BLACK	10	45	17	30	10	12	4	8
		WHITE	0				0			
		HISPAN	0				0			
	TOTAL:		10	45	17	31	10	12	4	8
	N-N	BLACK	3	45	27	37	3	11	7	9
		WHITE	3	85	56	67	3	8	3	6
		HISPAN	0				0			
	TOTAL:		6	85	27	52	6	11	3	8
TOTAL:			38	85	17	35	36	12	3	9
FEMALE	Y	BLACK	12	53	19	34	11	12	8	10
		WHITE	0				0			
		HISPAN	0				0			
	TOTAL:		12	53	19	34	11	12	8	10
	N-L	BLACK	7	49	26	32	7	12	8	10
		WHITE	4	42	20	28	4	11	2	8
		HISPAN	0				0			
	TOTAL:		11	49	20	30	11	12	2	9
	N-N	BLACK	11	44	24	31	10	12	5	8
		WHITE	3	41	23	31	3	12	7	9
		HISPAN	1	22	22	22	1	12	12	12
	TOTAL:		15	42	22	31	14	12	5	9
TOTAL:			38	53	19	32	36	12	2	9

* EMPLOYMENT CODES: Y = employed full or part-time
N-L = unemployed and looking for work
N-N = not in labor force

Education and Age Summary by Sex and Ethnicity

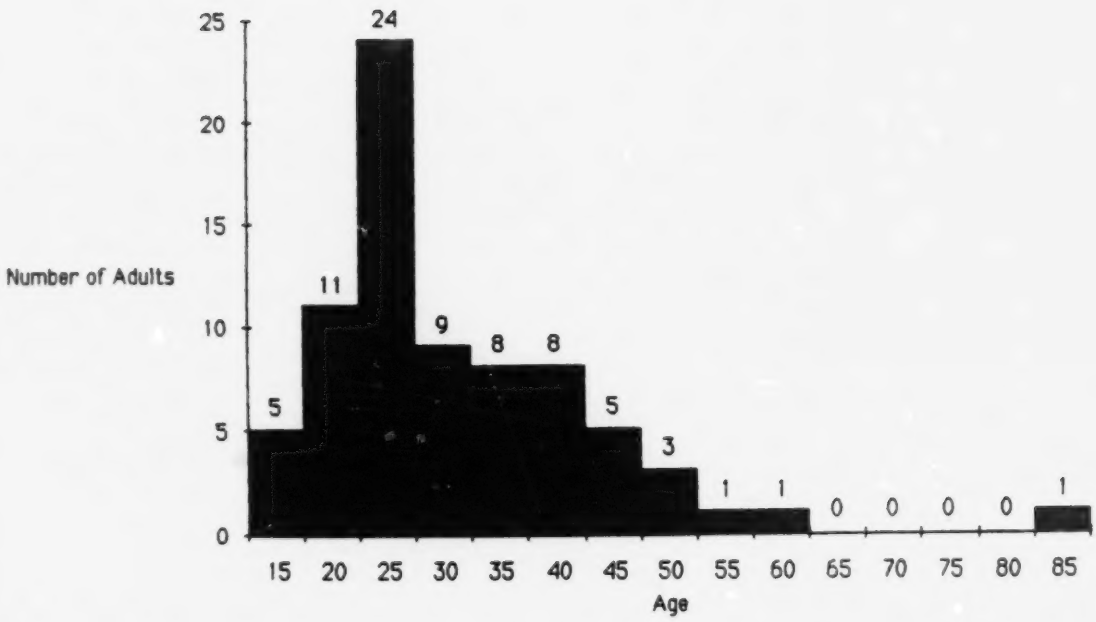
			AGE				EDUCATION		
		n	MAX	MIN	AVE	n	MAX	MIN	AVE
MALE	BLACK	30	53	17	33	29	12	3	9
	WHITE	7	85	19	45	6	11	3	8
	HISPAN	1	21	21	21	1	12	12	12
TOTAL:		38	85	17	35	36	12	3	9
FEMALE	BLACK	30	53	19	32	28	12	5	9
	WHITE	7	42	20	29	7	12	2	8
	HISPAN	1	22	22	22	1	12	12	12
TOTAL:		38	53	19	32	36	12	2	9
TOTAL:		76	85	17	33	72	12	2	9

Employment Summary	Employed		Unemployed		Not looking		TOTAL	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Male	22	58%	10	26%	6	16%	38	50%
Female	12	32%	11	29%	15	39%	38	50%
Total	34	45%	21	28%	21	27%	76	100%

Ethnic Summary	Black		White		Hispanic	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Male	30		7		1	
Female	30		7		1	
	60	79%	14	18%	2	3%

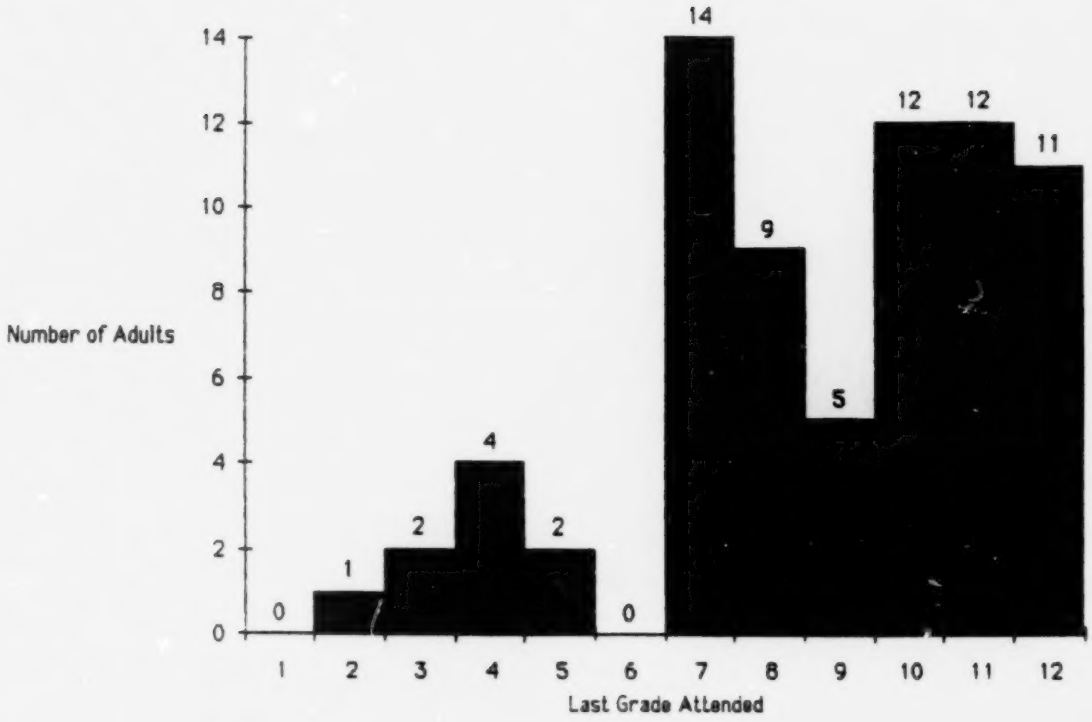
APPENDIX B

Age Distribution of Adults Interviewed with ALEP IPC



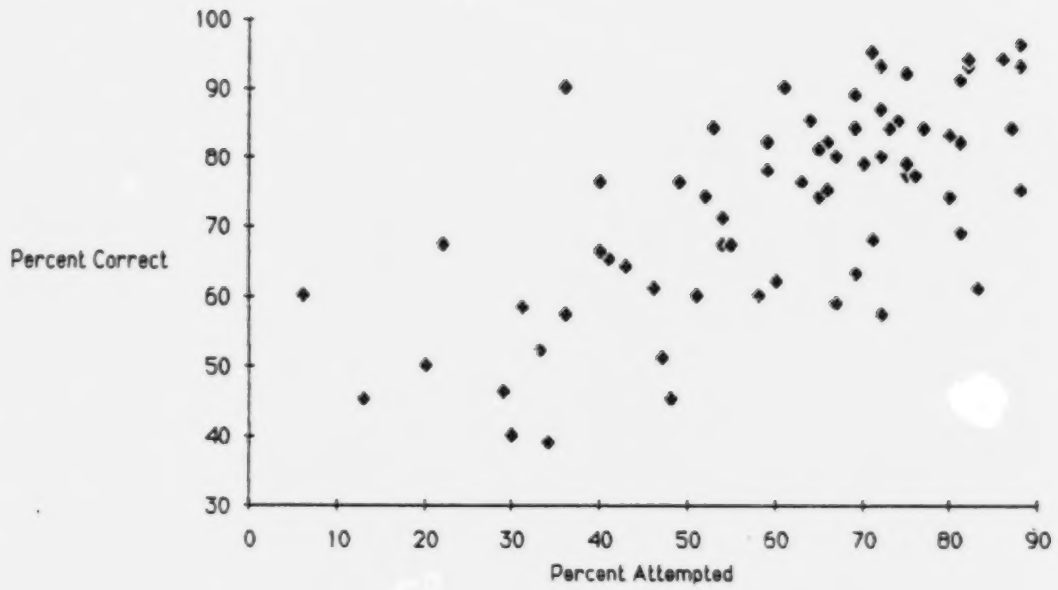
APPENDIX C

Education Distribution of Adults Interviewed with ALEP IPC



APPENDIX D

Response To Picture Reading Task In ALEP IPC
(Percentage of words and phrases read correctly versus percentage attempted orally)



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